

# Y Wladfa

**Y Wladfa** (Welsh pronunciation: [ə ˈwladva], 'The Colony'),<sup>[2]</sup> also occasionally **Y Wladychfa Gymreig** (Welsh pronunciation: [ə wlaˈdɨxva gəmˈreig], 'The Welsh Settlement'),<sup>[3][4]</sup> refers to the establishment of settlements by **Welsh** colonists and immigrants in the Argentine **Patagonia**, beginning in 1865, mainly along the coast of the lower **Chubut Valley**.<sup>[5]</sup> In 1881, the area became part of the Chubut National Territory of Argentina which, in 1955, became **Chubut Province**.<sup>[6]</sup>



Welsh speaking settlements in Argentina

In the 19th and early 20th century, the Argentine government encouraged emigration from Europe to populate Argentina and south Patagonia particularly, which until the **Conquest of the Desert** had sparsely rural and coastal settlements. Indigenous peoples of Patagonia include the **Tehuelche** and the **Yahgan**.

Between 1856 and 1875, 34 settlements of immigrants of various nationalities were established in **Santa Fe** and **Entre Ríos**. In addition to the main colony in Chubut, a smaller colony was set up in Santa Fe by 44 **Welsh people** who left Chubut, and another group settled at **Coronel Suárez** in southern **Buenos Aires Province**.<sup>[7][8]</sup>

<div><b>Welsh Argentines</b></div> <div><i>Ariannin Cymreig</i> (<b>Welsh</b>)</div> <div><i>Galenses</i> (<b>Spanish</b>)</div>
<div></div> <div>Flag of Y Wladfa colony</div>
<div><b>Total population</b></div> <div>70,000<sup>[1]</sup></div>
<div><b>Regions with significant populations</b></div> <div><b>Chubut Province</b></div>
<div><b>Languages</b></div> <div><b>Spanish</b>, Patagonian Welsh, <b>English</b></div>
<div><b>Religion</b></div> <div><b>Protestantism</b> (mostly <b>Methodism</b> and <b>Presbyterianism</b>) and <b>Roman Catholicism</b></div>
<div><b>Related ethnic groups</b></div> <div>Welsh, Argentines, English Argentines, Irish Argentines, Scottish Argentines, Welsh Brazilians, Welsh Americans, Welsh Canadians, Welsh Australians</div>

The Welsh-Argentine community is centred on [Gaiman](#), [Dolavon](#), [Trelew](#), and [Trevelin](#).<sup>[9]</sup> There are 70,000 Welsh-Patagonians. However, Chubut estimates the number of Patagonian Welsh speakers to be about 1,500, while other estimates put the number at 5,000.<sup>[10][11]</sup>

## History

### First settlers 1865



Percentage of people registered as British in the 1914 Argentine census. Within this group are Welsh, English, Irish and Scottish.



The Rev. Michael D. Jones (1822–1898)



Reconstruction of the flag used in the 19th century, at least in 1865. Has gained popularity in recent years. <sup>[12]</sup>

The idea of a Welsh colony in [Patagonia](#) was put forward by [Michael D. Jones](#), a [Welsh nationalist nonconformist](#) preacher<sup>[13]:23</sup> based in [Bala, Gwynedd](#), who had called for a new "little Wales beyond Wales". He spent some years in the [United States](#), where he observed that Welsh immigrants assimilated very quickly compared with other peoples and often lost much of their Welsh identity.<sup>[13]:22</sup> Thus, the original proposal was to establish a new Wales overseas where Welsh settlers and their culture would be generally free from foreign domination.<sup>[14]</sup> He proposed setting up a [Welsh-speaking](#) colony away from the influence of the [English language](#). He recruited settlers and provided financing; [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#) and even [Palestine](#) were considered, but Patagonia was chosen for its isolation and the Argentines' offer of 100 square miles (260 km<sup>2</sup>) of land along the [Chubut River](#) in exchange for settling the still-unconquered land of Patagonia for Argentina. Patagonia, including the Chubut Valley, was claimed by Buenos Aires but it had little control over the area (which was also claimed by Chile).<sup>[13]:23–30</sup> Jones had been corresponding with the Argentine government about settling an area known as [Bahía Blanca](#) where Welsh immigrants could preserve their language and culture. The Argentine government granted the request as it put them in control of a large tract of land. A Welsh immigration committee met in Liverpool and published a handbook, *Llawlyfr y Wladfa*, to

publicize the scheme to form a Welsh colony in Patagonia which was distributed throughout Wales.



Lewis Jones

Towards the end of 1862, Captain [Love Jones-Parry](#) and [Lewis Jones](#) (after whom Trelew was named) left for Patagonia to decide whether it was a suitable area for Welsh emigrants. They first visited [Buenos Aires](#) where they held discussions with the Interior Minister [Guillermo Rawson](#) then, having come to an agreement, headed south. They reached Patagonia in a small ship named the *Candelaria*, and were driven by a storm into a bay which they named *Porth Madryn*, after Jones-Parry's estate in Wales. The town that grew near the spot where they landed is now named [Puerto Madryn](#). On their return to Wales they declared the area to be very suitable for colonization.



The *Mimosa*.

On 28 July 1865, 153 [Welsh](#) settlers arrived aboard tea clipper [Mimosa](#).<sup>[15]</sup> The *Mimosa* settlers, including [tailors](#), [cobblers](#), [carpenters](#), [brickmakers](#), and [miners](#), comprised 56 married adults, 33 single or widowed men, 12 single women (usually sisters or servants of married immigrants), and 52 children; the majority (92) were from the [South Wales Coalfield](#) and English urban centres.<sup>[13]:35</sup> There were few [farmers](#). This was rather unfortunate, particularly when they discovered that the attractions of the area had been oversold and they had landed in an arid semi-[desert](#) with little food; they had been told that the area was like lowland Wales. At the coast there was little [drinking water](#), and the group embarked on a walk across the parched plain with a single wheelbarrow to carry their belongings. Some died and a baby, Mary Humphries, was born on the march. John Williams was the only colonist with any form of rudimentary [medical skill](#). So disheartened were some settlers, they requested that the British Government settle them on the Falkland Islands. However, this request was ignored.

Once they reached the valley of the Chubut River, their first settlement was a small fortress on the site which later became the town of [Rawson](#), now the capital of [Chubut Province](#).<sup>[13]:45</sup> This was referred to as *Yr Hen Amddiffynfa* ('The Old Fortress').<sup>[13]:44</sup> The first houses, constructed from earth, were washed away by a flash flood in 1865, and new houses of superior quality were built to replace them.<sup>[13]:45–47</sup> The floods also washed away crops of potatoes and maize.<sup>[13]:52</sup> The rainfall in the area was much less than the colonists had been led to expect, leading to crop failures.

## Consolidation 1866–1888



Welsh traditions in Rawson



Y Draffod

The settlers first made contact with the local [Tehuelche people](#) almost a year after their arrival. After some difficult early years of suspicion and some violence, the Tehuelche people established cordial relationships with the Welsh and helped the settlement survive the early food shortages. The settlers, led by Aaron Jenkins (whose wife Rachel was the first to bring up the idea of systematic use of irrigation canals), soon established Argentina's first [irrigation](#) system based on the Chubut River (in Welsh, *Afon Camwy*, 'winding river'), irrigating an area three or four miles (five or six km) to each side of the 50-mile (80 km) long stretch of river and creating Argentina's

most fertile wheatlands. By 1885, wheat production had reached 6,000 tons, with wheat produced by the colony winning the gold medal at international expositions at [Paris](#) and [Chicago](#).



Harvest time in Patagonia, c.1880

The mouth of the [Chubut River](#) was difficult to navigate, being shallow and with shifting sandbanks, and it was decided that a railway was required to connect the Lower Chubut valley to [Puerto Madryn](#) (originally Porth Madryn) on the [Golfo Nuevo](#) on the southern side of the [Valdes Peninsula](#).<sup>[13]:80–81</sup> Lewis Jones was the driving force, and in 1884 the Argentine Congress authorized the construction of the [Central Chubut Railway](#) by Lewis Jones y Cía. Raising funds for the project locally proved difficult, so Lewis Jones went to the United Kingdom to seek funds, where he enlisted the assistance of Asahel P. Bell, an engineer. Work on the railway began in 1886, helped by the arrival of another 465 Welsh settlers on the steamer *Vesta*. The town that grew at the railhead was named *Trelew* (Town of Llew) in honour of Lewis Jones.<sup>[13]:86</sup> The town grew rapidly and in 1888 became the headquarters of the *Compañía Mercantil del Chubut* (Chubut Trading Company). Initially the settlers were largely self-governing, with all men and women of 18 years of age or over having the right to vote.

In January 1868, the first newspaper of the colony, *Y Brut* (*The Chronicle*), appeared; *Ein Breiniad* (*Our Privilege*) followed in 1878. Both were short-lived, only six issues of each title being circulated. Lewis Jones established *Y Dravod* (*The Discussion*) in 1891, and this had greater longevity: a weekly issue was produced until 1961.<sup>[16]</sup>



## Expansion towards the Andes 1885–1902



A Welsh school in Patagonia

By the mid-1880s most of the good agricultural land in the Lower Chubut valley had been claimed, and the colonists mounted a number of expeditions to explore other parts of Patagonia to seek more cultivable land. In 1885, the Welsh asked the governor of [Chubut Province](#), [Luis Jorge Fontana](#), for permission to arrange an expedition to explore the [Andean](#) part of Chubut. Fontana decided to accompany the expedition in person. By the end of November 1885 they had reached a fertile area which the Welsh named *Cwm Hyfryd* (Pleasant Valley). By 1888, this site at the foot of the Andes had become another Welsh settlement,<sup>[16]</sup> named in Spanish *Colonia 16 de Octubre*. As the population grew here, the towns of [Esquel](#) and [Trevelin](#) were founded.

In 1893, a Welsh-language newspaper called [Y Draffod](#) (The Conversation) was founded by Lewis Jones to promote Welshness in Y Wladfa.<sup>[17]</sup>

This area became the subject of the [Cordillera of the Andes Boundary Case 1902](#) between Argentina and Chile. Initially the border was defined by a line connecting the highest peaks in the area, but it later became clear that this line was not the same as the line separating the watersheds, with some of the rivers in the area flowing westwards. Argentina and Chile agreed that the United Kingdom should act as arbitrator, and the views of the Welsh settlers were canvassed. In 1902, despite an offer of a league of land per family from Chile, they voted to remain in Argentina.

## Setbacks in the Lower Chubut Valley 1899–1915



A flooded settlement in the Welsh colony

Serious damage was caused by floods in the 1890s and 1900s, which devastated Rawson and to a lesser extent [Gaiman](#), though Trelew was not affected. There was also disagreement between the settlers and the [government of Argentina](#), which introduced [conscription](#) and insisted on males of military age drilling on Sundays. This ran counter to the [Sabbatarian](#) principles of the settlers and caused much ill-feeling, though the matter was eventually resolved by the intervention of the [president of Argentina, Julio Argentino Roca](#). These factors, and a lack of unclaimed farmable land, caused 234 people to leave for [Liverpool](#) aboard the *Orissa* on 14 May 1902, with 208 of them subsequently travelling to [Canada](#), arriving at [Saltcoats, Saskatchewan](#), in late June,<sup>[18]</sup> although some of these families later returned to Chubut and later migrated to Australia. Some other settlers moved to [Río Negro Province](#) in Argentina. Many of those who left Chubut were late arrivals who had failed to obtain land of their own, and they were replaced by more immigrants from Wales. By the end of the 19th century there were some 4,000 people of Welsh descent living in Chubut. The last substantial migration from Wales took place shortly before [World War I](#), which put a halt to further immigration. Approximately 1,000 Welsh immigrants arrived in Patagonia between 1886 and 1911; on the basis of this and other statistics, Glyn Williams estimated that perhaps no more than 2,300 Welsh people ever migrated directly to Patagonia.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Later development



A Welsh tea house in Chubut

Immigration to the area after 1914 was mainly from [Italy](#) and other southern European countries. Welsh became a minority language. The creation of a [cooperative](#), the *Cwmni Masnachol Camwy* (Spanish: *Compañía Mercantil de Chubut*), was important. The Society traded on the settlers' behalf in [Buenos Aires](#) and acted as a bank with 14 branches. The cooperative society collapsed in the [Great Depression](#) of the 1930s. The construction of a dam on the Rio Chubut 120



kilometres (75 mi) west of Trelew, inaugurated on 19 April 1963, removed the risk of flooding in the Lower Chubut Valley.

The Welsh have left their mark on the landscape, with [windmills](#) and [chapels](#) across the province, including the distinctive wood and corrugated zinc Capel Salem and [Trelew's](#) Salon San David. Many settlements along the valley bear Welsh names.



A Welsh chapel in Gaiman

During the British Government's [repatriation](#) of the 11,313 [Argentine POWs](#) taken during the 1982 [Falklands War](#), Welsh-speaking British merchant seamen and British soldiers from the [Welsh Guards](#) were shocked to find themselves addressed in Patagonian Welsh by an Argentine POW who was on the way home to [Puerto Madryn](#).<sup>[20]</sup> Over the years since, close ties between Wales and Y Wladfa have been reestablished.

A 2001 [BBC](#) article described in detail the recent visit to [Chubut Province](#) by [Archdruid Meirion Evans](#) and 30 members of the [Gorsedd Cymru](#) in order to revive the *Gorsedd Y Wladfa* in a ceremony held in a specially constructed [stone circle](#) near [Gaiman](#).

Every year, the [Eisteddfod](#) festival takes place in the town of [Trevelin](#).<sup>[21]</sup> BBC reporters attended the 2001 *Eisteddfod del Chubut* at [Trelew](#) and watched as the [Bardic Chair](#) was awarded for the first time in *Y Wladfa* to a female poet: Gaiman hotel owner Monica Jones de Jones, for an *Awdl* on the subject of *Rhyddid* ("Freedom"). The article's author continued, "The Patagonia Eisteddfod itself, while sharing those elements common to Eisteddfodau in Wales itself, nonetheless is, in other respects, quite a different affair. As well as haunting [Welsh folk tunes](#), and recitations in the unique Spanish-accented Welsh of the Patagonians, there are also rousing displays of Argentine [folk dancing](#) which owe everything to the [culture of the gauchos](#) and nothing to the somewhat tamer dance routines of the Welsh homeland."<sup>[22]</sup>

Current Eisteddfod competitions are [bilingual](#), in both Patagonian Welsh and [Argentine Spanish](#), and include poetry, prose, [literary translations](#) (Welsh, Spanish, English, Italian, and French), musical performances, arts, folk dances, photography, and filmmaking among others. The *Eisteddfod del Juventud* is held every September at Gaiman. The main *Eisteddfod del Chubut* is held every October at [Trelew](#). Other annual eisteddfodau are held at [Trevelin](#), in the [Andes](#) and at [Puerto Madryn](#) along the [South Atlantic](#) coast.<sup>[23]</sup>

In 2006, the first of a [two-Test tour](#) to [Argentina](#) by the [Wales national rugby union team](#) was played in Puerto Madryn, which was a 27–25 win for Argentina.

As of 2019, 1,411 people undertook Welsh courses in the region, which is the highest number on record for the project.<sup>[24]</sup> There are three bilingual Welsh/Spanish primary schools in the province of Chubut, namely [Ysgol yr Hendre](#) in Trelew, [Ysgol Gymraeg y Gaiman](#) in Gaiman, and [Ysgol Y Cwm](#) in Trevelin.<sup>[25]</sup>

In 2014, Professor E. Wyn James of [Cardiff University](#) estimated that there were perhaps as many as 5,000 people in Patagonia who could speak Welsh.<sup>[26]</sup>

On 28 July 2015, celebrations took place to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Welsh migrations. The [First Minister of Wales](#), [Carwyn Jones](#), attended the celebration.<sup>[27]</sup>

In October 2018, the [BBC National Orchestra of Wales](#) undertook an historic visit to Y Wladfa to give two concerts in a newly refurbished concert hall, that had previously been a wool factory on the outskirts of Trelew. These performances attracted thousands of local visitors and helped celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Welsh migration. Welsh harpist [Catrin Finch](#) and conductor [Grant Llewelyn](#) were part of the concerts.

## Welsh relationship with Indigenous people

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The Welsh settlers to Patagonia settled on indigenous [Tehuelche](#) land. The Welsh were able to survive and thrive by bartering Welsh bread for meat, by learning from Tehuelche people how to hunt, and by learning from the Tehuelche how to irrigate their fields with water from the Chubut River.<sup>[28][29]</sup>

## Welsh language names for Argentine places

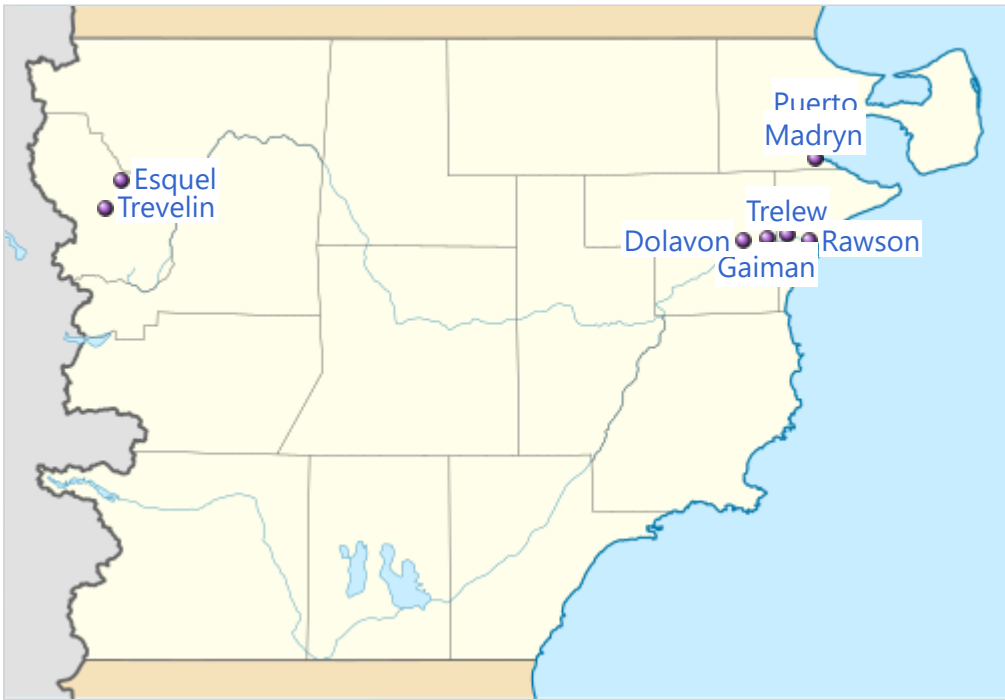
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The beach at Puerto Madryn

Spanish	Welsh	English translation of Welsh name
Argentina	Yr Ariannin	Argentina
Villa La Angostura	Lle Cul	narrow place
Arroyo Pescado	Nant y Pysgod	fish stream
Colonia 16 de Octubre	Cwm Hyfryd/Bro Hydref	beautiful valley/Autumn community
Fuerte Aventura	Caer Antur	fort adventure
Paso de Indios	Rhyd yr Indiaid	Indians' ford
Las Plumas	Dôl y Plu	meadow of the feathers
Puerto Madryn	Porth Madryn	(Port Madryn)
Rawson	Trerawson	(Rawson)
Río Chubut (from Tehuelche 'Chupat', meaning 'shining, glinting')	Afon Camwy	swirling river
Río Corintos	Aber Gyrrants	turning estuary
Valle de los Mártires	Dyffryn y Merthyron	valley of the martyrs
Valle Frío	Dyffryn Oer	cold valley
Trelew	Tre Lew(is)	Lew's town
Dolavon	Dôl Afon	river meadow
Trevelin	Tre Felin	mill town

Map



Welsh speaking settlements in Chubut

# Anthem



A printed version of *Gwlad Newydd y Cymry*

Y Wladfa's anthem is a re-working of the Welsh anthem, "[Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau](#)", called "[Gwlad Newydd y Cymry](#)" ("The New Country of the Welsh"). The new anthem was penned by Lewis Evans and is sung to the same tune as "[Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau](#)".<sup>[30]</sup>

## Popular culture

*[Patagonia](#)* is a 2011 film about the Welsh settlement in Argentina.<sup>[31]</sup>

In the BBC's 2015 *Patagonia with Huw Edwards*, [Huw Edwards](#) travelled to Patagonia and met with descendants of the original settlers, to discuss what had survived of the uniquely Welsh culture their ancestors aimed to protect.<sup>[32]</sup>

## See also

 [Argentina portal](#)

 [Wales portal](#)

- [Eluned Morgan](#) (author)
- [Irish Argentine](#)
- [Richard Bryn Williams](#)
- [Conquest of the Desert](#)
- [Scottish Argentine](#)
- [Spanish colonization attempt of the Strait of Magellan](#)
- [Thomas Benbow Phillips](#)
- [Welsh settlement in the Americas](#)
- [Welsh Tract](#)

- *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*
- *Patagonia (film)*

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<https://studiaethnologicapragensia.ff.cuni.cz/en/magazin/2023-1-2/>

## External links

- **Project-Hiraeth** – Documents the stories of the Welsh colony in Patagonia, Argentina through film, text and illustration. (<http://project-hiraeth.com/>)
- **Glaniad** – A website that tells the story of the Welsh settlements in Patagonia (<http://www.glaniad.com/>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160808130811/http://www.glaniad.com/>) 8 August 2016 at the **Wayback Machine**
- **Y Wladfa** — The Welsh in Patagonia (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A1163503>) on h2g2
- **BBC Wales History on the Welsh migration to Patagonia** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070104024938/http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/migration/pages/patagonia.shtml>)
- **Andes Celtig** (<http://www.andesceltig.com>) A trilingual website with information, maps and photographs of the Welsh settlements in Patagonia
- **Teithiau Tango** ([https://web.archive.org/web/20120426062713/http://www.teithiutango.co.uk/index.php/en\\_US/home/argentina](https://web.archive.org/web/20120426062713/http://www.teithiutango.co.uk/index.php/en_US/home/argentina)) A bilingual website with in-depth history of the Welsh Patagonia region.
- *A Place of Meadows and Tall Trees* (<http://aplaceofmeadowsandtalltrees.blogspot.co.uk/>) : a novel based on the early years of the Patagonian settlement by Clare Dudman.
- **BBC News: Viewpoint – The Argentines who speak Welsh** (<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29611380>)
- **Patagonian Welsh national anthem discovered in 19th century pamphlet** (<http://www.culture24.org.uk/history-and-heritage/art531163-a-song-for-a-new-welsh-nation-patagonian-welsh-national-anthem-discovered-in-19th-century-pamphlet>)
- Videos of papers at a conference on Wales and the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia held at Aberystwyth University, 6 June 2015.**Cynhadledd Patagonia/Patagonia Conference** (<https://ywladfa150.wordpress.com/conference-the-welsh-in-patagonia-cynhadledd-y-cymry-ym-mhatagonia/>)
- Videos of papers at a conference on Wales and the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia held at Cardiff University, 6–7 July 2015.

- Y Wladfa Gymreig ym Mhatagonia – YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPxx37uA8RSKxlcgaGyBHbM3thMDz1bdu>)
- Imaginaire Celtique YouTube: "The Celtes around the World", with Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, Director of School of Irish Studies, Concordia University. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWrMvo2tLJo&t=3s>)